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Innovative Biodiversity Study to Monitor Meadowlands Environment

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today approved funds for a study that will help measure the recovery of the District's ecosystem and prompt policies that will spur the return of biological diversity in the Meadowlands.

"This study will help us establish an annual environmental report card, which follows the directive of our Master Plan, so we can further monitor the successes of our conservation and restoration efforts in the Meadowlands," said NJMC Chair and New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Susan Bass Levin. "Our studies and monitoring projects thus far have shown improvement in the Meadowlands' ecosystem. We are looking to fine tune our policies further to do an even better job of managing this important natural resource for New Jersey's residents."

The NJMC allocated \$35,228 to Hudsonia Ltd., a non-profit environmental research institute, to conduct the first year of the study that will monitor the biodiversity of organisms in the Meadowlands District. In the study, a number of key species will be monitored along five different locations in the Meadowlands District to represent the ecosystem's overall biodiversity. These species will continue to be monitored over a period of years to more fully establish the data needed to assess biodiversity trends.

The biodiversity study will track butterflies, odonates (dragonflies and damselflies) and orthopterans (grasshoppers, katydids and crickets) at each location. Clam shrimp, whose habitats are known to be puddles along dirt roads, will be studied near a service road at the Richard P. Kane Natural Area. Floating marsh pennywort, a plant which is rare in the state of New Jersey but abundant in the Meadowlands, will be observed at Kingsland Creek, the Guarini Tract and the Kearny Marsh.

The organisms selected for monitoring, except the dragonflies and butterflies, stay in small areas and do not migrate so their populations are responding primarily to local environmental changes in the Meadowlands. The migratory species, however, depend upon local insects and nectar for survival, also making them a good candidate for the study.

The Meadowlands Environmental Research Institute, the scientific arm of the NJMC, currently monitors water quality and air quality in the Meadowlands District. MERI is also monitoring vegetation composition through remote sensing. Studies of the

Meadowlands District's bird population are being conducted through the New Jersey Audubon Society, and MERI completed a comprehensive fish study last year, which replicated a study done 15 years prior. Information gathered from the biodiversity study will be integrated into these existing studies to help create an environmental report card for the Meadowlands District.

"In order to properly establish a comprehensive environmental report card for the Meadowlands District, we must look to long-term indicators for the sustainability of the ecosystem," said NJMC Executive Director Robert Ceberio. "In addition to establishing a sound scientific basis for policymaking, this report card also will help increase the public's awareness of the major recovery going on in the Meadowlands."

A report based on initial data will be submitted to MERI at the end of the year. The report may also include recommendations about modifying research methods for future information gathering.

Hudsonia Ltd. was founded in 1981 and is a not-for-profit institute for research, rendering educational and technical assistance in the environmental sciences. It is based at the Bard College Field Station on the Hudson River in New York. Wetland and estuarine biota, rare species and their habitats, ecology and management of invasive species, and biodiversity assessment are at the heart of Hudsonia's research programs. The organization has already been engaged in years of research in the Meadowlands District.

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